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REVIEW

Geography of Religions

David E. Sopher

Foundations of Cultural Geography Series, Prentice-Hall, Englewood
Cliffs, N. J., 1967. 128 pp., maps, index. \$1.95 paperbound; \$4.50
clothbound.

This is the first book written in English dealing exclusively with the geography of religion. Consequently it contributes to the field of cultural geography by organizing some ideas and scattered publications dealing with the geography of religion into a single text.

After defining and differentiating religious groups Sopher presents his material under four main headings: the environmental setting for religious systems; the expression of religion on the landscape; the religious organization of space; and the distribution of religions. The author expands upon these four themes satisfactorily by discussing various religious systems of the world. His comments and illustrative diagrams dealing with the fourth theme, especially the section on the "geographical patterns of interaction among religions," are well presented and pertinent to an analysis of religious distributions. However, in the chapter on the second theme the author strays from the major concern with the spatial properties of religion into a discussion about how religion may be one of the many variables influencing the distribution of other phenomena.

The major disappointment with this publication is the lack of consideration about several vital geographic questions. It is true that a small survey text cannot cover all aspects of the field, so some topics and previous studies may need to be omitted. Unfortunately the weakness of this book is not its size but its emphasis. Too many pages are devoted to the functional differences between religious systems rather than discussing the spatial manifestations of those systems. One who is interested in the spatial structure of religious phenomena finds very few comments dealing with questions such as the following: How do the areal manifestations of religion vary with the arrangement of other phenomena? What are the spatial relationships between the distribution of religious features and the populations to which they are functionally related? How does distance influence the patterns of religious activity? Does the distance between interacting places affect religious behavior in the same manner as it affects economic behavior?

In this text there are only scattered clues to answer these questions. A few paragraphs (p. 29) present a comparison between the density of religious buildings and the density of population, but comments

about the areal relationship between religious features and population or other phenomena are rare. A report on those studies which relate the distribution of churches with the arrangement of other phenomena {e.g., Chaplin, Hebert, Martin, Myers, Dornbush and White) are missing from this book. Sopher mentions (p. 26) that variations in religion involve differences in the utilization of space, and he discusses (pp. 63, 64) the territoriality of some religious groups. However, such a pertinent study as the one by Stewart and Warntz, in which the regularity between potentials of population values and the area of Episcopal parishes in the United States was discovered, is omitted. The author does indicate (p. 54) that distance-cost factors are not significant in explaining the flow of pilgrims in France. Yet there is no reference to the several studies that analyze church attendance in the United States according to the expectations of low-order functions in central places.

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